

**AGING IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
OF THE
COMMISSION ON AGING**

Date: October 12, 2021
9:30am-11:30 am

“Updates and COA Advocacy Opportunities in the Affordable Rental Senior Housing Sector”

In Attendance: Monica Schaeffer (co-chair, AIC), Wayne Berman (co-chair, AIC), Barbara Selter, Nanine Meiklejohn, Richard Jourdenais, Marsha Weber, Eddie Rivas, Joyce Dubow, Mary Sweeney, Art Williams, Jean Dinwiddie, Laurie Pross, Kendell Matthews, Nkiru Ezeani, Betsy Carrier, Mona Grieser, Karon Phillips, Virginia Cain, Mary Hunter, Sibon Ncube, Isabelle Schoenfeld

Staff: Pazit Aviv, MoCo; Shawn Brennan, MoCo; Marcia Pruzan, Age-Friendly Montgomery; Barbara Brubeck;

Guests: Carmen Castro-Conroy, Managing Counselor, Montgomery County Housing Initiative Partnership, Inc. (HIP); Michele Higgs, (HIP); Mary Hunter (HIP), Lesia Bullock (HIP), Claudia Jutila, Barbara Brubeck, Matt Losak, Executive, Director, Renters Alliance, Inc; William Roberts, Board Chair, Renters Alliance, Inc; Sara Fought, Jewish Council for the Aging.

Opening Remarks from the Co-Chairs: Monica and Wayne welcomed everyone, especially the newest Commissioners. Everyone had a chance to introduce themselves. Monica announced that Mary Sweeney will be the incoming co-Chair of the AIC in January 2022, when Monica’s term will end. Monica also reviewed the agenda and focus for the meeting – “Updates and COA Advocacy Opportunities in the Affordable Rental Senior Housing Sector.” The guest speakers for the meeting were Carmen Castro-Conroy, Managing Counselor, Montgomery County Housing Initiative Partnership, Inc; Michele Higgs, Housing Initiative Partnership; Matt Losak, Executive, Director, Renters Alliance, Inc; William Roberts, Renters Alliance, Inc.; and Pazit Aviv, Montgomery County MoCo Area Agency on Aging. The powerpoints of the presenters accompany these minutes.

Approval of the Minutes: The minutes of the September 14th meeting were approved and seconded.

PRESENTATIONS AND QUESTIONS: “Updates and COA Advocacy Opportunities in the Affordable Rental Senior Housing Sector”

- The first presentation was an update on the Home Sharing Project in the County, presented by Carmen Castro-Conroy, Managing Counselor, Montgomery Housing Initiative Partnership (HIP), Inc. Michele Higgs, also with HIP, helped to provide additional program information on HIP and the Home Sharing program. HIP is a nonprofit partner with MC HHS and is involved in providing assistance for residents to obtain affordable housing via single home rehabs, multifamily housing development, and housing counseling. Home Sharing is an innovative idea where homeowners offer a spare room or Accessory Dwelling Unit in their home for rent to home seekers searching for affordable, healthy and safe housing for longer than 6 months. Housing counselors help both the homeowner and the home seeker navigate the process to find a compatible match using remote technology. They offer neutral guidance and advice to find a successful match using a thoughtful and engaging process. Home sharing can reduce social isolation, create monthly income for homeowners, and generate new affordable housing options for home seekers. HIP’s Montgomery County Home Sharing Program is supported by Montgomery

County's Department of Health & Human Services and offers 4 months of free access to the Silvernest matching platform, which provides background checks, lease creators and home sharing insurance. With HSS, HIP recently completed a pilot study of the feasibility of rental assistance for affordable rental housing. In the fall of 2020, policies and procedures were developed to guide the new program. Communication procedures via the web and social media were established along with a call number: 301-85-SHARE. A new communication outreach coordinator was hired. Next, a process was developed to create rental profiles, find ideal housemates and ensure sustainable matches between renter and landlord. The matching process utilizes an electronic platform know as "Silvernest". In 2021, marketing efforts began using The Beacon newspaper, Maryland Public TV, Bethesda Magazine, and monthly flyer mailings. Today, matches have been made in Takoma Park and Germantown. Program challenges presented by homeowners include communication technology, bilingual issues and financial barriers, e.g. asking higher rent than is affordable. Program challenges presented by renters include communication technology, bilingual issues and low income. A major gap exists between the amount of rent that the homeowners want to receive and the amount of rent that the renter is able to pay. The HIP is working on solutions to bridge this gap. In addition, the HIP engages in the negotiation of rental process between homeowner and renter. Thus far, the average time to complete a match is 3-4 months. For more information, go to: www.HIPhomes.org/Home-Sharing

The second presentation was given by Matt Losak, Executive Director of the Renter's Alliance, Inc. and William Roberts also associated with the Renters Alliance. Both participated in the update of issues and activities of the Renters Alliance. Mr. Losak spoke of the rental eviction crisis that exists due to the COVID pandemic. Currently 40% of residents live in rental housing including many senior women. Some 15-30 thousand renters in MC are in rental payment arrears. Rent relief is available, but to date, 2/3 of those eligible haven't applied for the aid. 90-Day eviction notices are still issued and evictions can happen simply by landlords not renewing leases. Legislation at the state level to allow Montgomery County to adopt a "just cause" eviction policy is intended to prevent arbitrary evictions. However, the legislation has failed largely because of the opposition of Representative Kumar Barve who represents the County's 17th District. Mr. Roberts added that the County's voluntary rental guidelines, adopted at the start of the pandemic, have expired and need to be extended; however, there is some opposition at the County Council level. Renters face stark choices - move away or become homeless. Legislation is needed at the State level. The COA was advised to stay informed of the issue and communicate it to others.

- The third and final presentation was given by Pazit Aviv and was a brief update on MoCo Housing Opportunities Commission's (HOC's) two renovated senior buildings. Pazit Aviv provided the update on Elizabeth House in Silver Spring and Upton II in Rockville. Elizabeth House is a multi-family dwelling with 238 affordable units (LIHTC) and 29 at market rate. The Upton II facility is similar to the Elizabeth House facility.

A good, robust discussion with questions and answers followed each of the three presentations.

UPCOMING MEETING: The next AIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 9th from 9:30 am-11:30 am. The main meeting focus of the meeting will be to review our programs over the past year to begin to formulate some action items and ideas for programming in 2022. It will be facilitated by Wayne Berman and Mary Sweeney.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 11:40 am